

DRIVEN TO SPREAD THE WORD

THE BEACON THURSDAY JANUARY 27, 2005



Troubles often settle into the back seat of a cab. These Christian drivers offer a solution to life's tempest lost.

BY MICHELLE MIZAL-ARCHER
THE VIRGINIAN PILOT

Tom Pocky parks Yellow Cab No. 3 in front of a Laundromat at Norfolk Naval Station, where David Mueller, a machinist mate, gets into the car.

“Where to, boss? Pocky asks.

Muller tells him to take him to a nearby bank and then home.

“Gotcha, boss,” Pocky says, putting the cab into gear.

But the car conversation isn't the typical watcha-think-of-this-weather talk, and Pocky isn't a couldn't-care-a-less cabbie.

Muller tells Pocky about his job and home life. That's an open door for Pocky to say something encouraging.

“It's what you make of it,” Pocky tell Mueller, giving him a discount on what would have been a \$13 fare. “Why don't we just make it \$10?”

The good Samaritan deeds are what being a Christian taxi driver is all about, Pocky said.

Pocky, 36, belongs to a local chapter of the Christian Cabbie Fellowship. There are no formal meetings or dues for the dozen local cab drivers who belong to the group.

The only requirements are that members must be cab drivers and live a Christian life. Information about the Fellowship is spread by word of mouth.

“I have a basic belief in Jesus Christ as the son of God, and died for our sins,” Pocky said.

“I try to give advice here and there, and I practice honestly. I try to act in a Christian way toward other people. I don’t rip them off, and I control road rage. I do my best to beat the stereotype of a taxi cab driver.”

There are times when his temperament is put to the test.

Once, he picked up a man and drove him through rush hour to Newport News. The man went into an apartment and never came out to pay the \$60 fare.

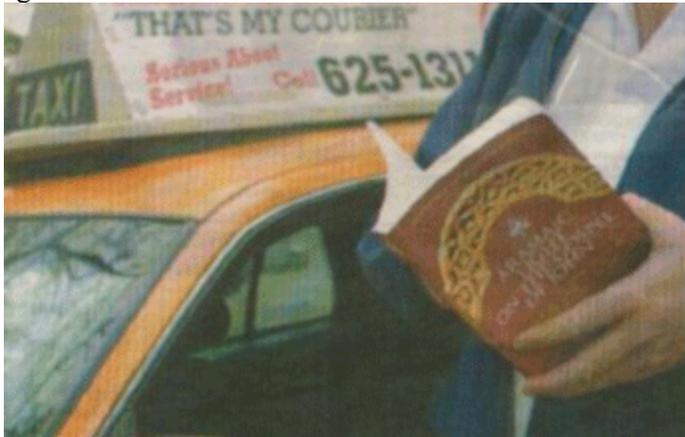
“I was pretty mad,” Pocky said. “In situations like that you can do one of two things. You can call the police, but there’s nothing much they can do. Or, you can realize that God is going to handle this for you, and you can forgive and let go. I prefer to do that.”

Pocky, who is a Pentecostal and lives near Mount Trashmore, started driving a cab about a year ago. He had been in the Navy and worked various jobs, including managing a car dealership. He liked the cab business for the flexible schedule.

He met Clause Midgette, a fellow cab driver, at a taxi stand at the Norfolk Naval Exchange.

Midgette told Pocky about the Fellowship. Suddenly the job had more meaning to Pocky. “God blesses us with his presence and shines through us. It’s almost routine in the cab business that you encounter people who are upset or troubled,” said Midgette, a born-again Christian who has been in the taxi business off and on for 17 years.

The resident of Norfolk’s Five Points co-founded the local Fellowship chapter six years ago.



Claude Midgette studies Aramaic, the language Jesus spoke, during his breaks from driving. Midgette said the studies help him to better understand the Bible.

Midgette, 53, learned about the group through conversations with Vernon Bevill, a wildlife biologist in Austin, Texas, whose oldest son, Bryan was stabbed to death after he had only been driving a cab for 10 months. The 32-year-old had picked up a drunk and hostile client.

Bevill said he wasn’t sure if Bryan had accepted Jesus as his savior a “spiritual experience” later told him and his wife Mary, that Bryan was in heaven.

Bevill, 59, started a Christian Cab group in Texas, and told others of his plans through conversations with members of the International Taxi Drivers Safety Council.

The West Virginia-based organization is dedicated to lobbying for safer conditions for cab drivers. Midgette joined the council some time after he was robbed and beat on the job in Portsmouth.

Jim L. Szekely Sr., director of the council, said cab drivers have one of the most dangerous professions in the United States Second only to law enforcement officers. Lax regulations on safety devices in cabs, as well as the kind of people that drivers often encounter, have resulted in hundreds of drivers murdered since the 1970s, he said.

Szekely supports and promotes the Christian Cabbie Fellowship.

“It’s my belief that if we can get more chapters going around the country, then the cab business can be a better business,” he said.



Cab driver Tom Pocky, left, talks to Joycelyn L. Carroll, a sailor stationed at Norfolk Naval Station, during a ride to the Base Exchange.

The Texas Christian cab group didn’t grow, Bevill said, but he did plant the seed.

Midgette and others around the country who talked with Bevill started their own chapters of the Fellowship. Bevill isn’t sure exactly how many chapters have been formed, but he’s happy to know it has caught on.

Midgette said Hampton Road’s chapter of the Christian Cabbie Fellowship used to meet for a monthly prayer breakfast at the House of Eggs on North Military Highway, where they talked about scriptures over pancakes, coffee and eggs.

An additional meeting was held once a month at the Tabernacle Church of Norfolk on Granby Street for an afternoon Bible study.

The meetings eventually dissolved, Midgette said it was meant to be.

“It’s God’s doing,” he said. “He created the fellowship and has grown it organically.

“He transformed it from a rigid structure to where now cabbies converse and talk about Christian things at cab stands. It’s about celebrating the presence of God.”

Sometimes the cabbies discretely preach to those they pick up.

Midgette said after introducing himself he’ll ask his client if they would like to listen to gospel music on the radio.

“If they say ‘fine,’ then that gives me permission to let the music minister to them,” Midgette said.

Then there was the time he picked up a man whose father was recently killed in a drunk-driving accident.

Midgette gave the man a copy of the New Testament and told him that things are in God’s hands and to “keep the faith.”

“That was a time when I really felt God had me there for a reason.” Midgette said.

Pocky also feels he has a purpose as a cab driver. He like working the Navy bases because that's where he can serve the most, he said.

"These folks need the most help," Pocky dais. "They're not from here. These young men (and women) are from all over the country."



Yellow Cab driver Tom Pocky says he likes working near Norfolk Naval Station, where he feels he can be the most helpful.

It's his Christian duty. He said, to help the newly enlisted find their way around Hampton Roads. He'll give them advice about family and finances, too, if the cab conversation takes a turn in that direction.

"When they're in my cab I don't want them to be stressed," Pocky said. "I want them to be in a good atmosphere."

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